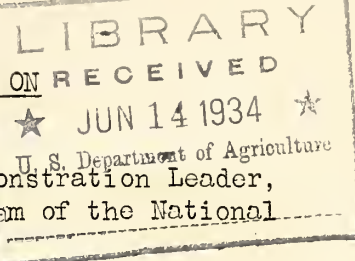


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THE INFLUENCE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK ON
FARM HOME LIFE



A radio talk by Miss Mary Ellen Brown, State Home Demonstration Leader, Lincoln, Nebraska, delivered in the Land Grant College program of the National Farm and Home Hour, May 16, 1934.

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Have any of your childhood dreams come true? As I stand here today I realize that some of my girlhood dreams have come true since the Agricultural Extension Service came into being after the signing of the Smith-Lever bill twenty years ago, today. As a girl growing up in a farm home, it seemed to me in some way there should be training that would help mother accomplish her housekeeping duties with more ease and that would help her carry her homemaking responsibilities with greater joy. I often wondered why we were not studying and reading things which would make our farm home happier. Then, too, the girls in our family needed to understand homemaking to improve their share of the farm home life; but at that time so far as we knew, there was no educational help available either for the girls or for mother.

Then came the Smith-Lever Act! And in the twenty years since its passage, farm women have been developing their skills, interests, personalities and appreciations under the guidance of the Agricultural Extension Service.

When mother lived on the farm, the city woman was enjoying the opportunities offered by women's clubs and other civic organizations but she lived many miles away, and being a busy farm woman mother could not attend city clubs. Today, farm women drive their own cars to their own educational clubs, study subjects they have helped select, under local leaders of their own choosing. Their club leaders have been trained by state specialists or county home demonstration agents in many phases of homemaking. Members of the clubs do not need to be lonesome to hear another woman's voice as my mother was, for the clubs have increased the sociability of the communities. Surely, this spirit of cooperation and unity makes the farm a better place to live today. At those club meetings conversation is about things - our demonstrations provide more interesting topics than idle gossip.

Recently, in Nebraska we asked the members of our county home economics councils to tell us what the home demonstration work had done for them. These council members are representative farm women who have had experience with extension work. Because I believe you may be interested in their replies, I want to tell you a few of the things they say home demonstration activities have done for them.

One of the benefits most often mentioned and one of the most fundamental is helping homemakers understand food values and helping them to realize the importance of food in maintaining the health of the family.

Extension work is practical and gives systematic training, it also stimulates a desire to study and to become better informed. It assists homemakers to make the best use of what is on hand and guides them toward being better buyers.

It adds satisfaction gained thru work well done for homemakers have frequently found their methods among the recommended and approved practices.
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An interesting and much appreciated phase of the extension field is that of developing local volunteer leadership. In Nebraska much of the home demonstration work is carried on thru the "local leader plan". Women have been enthusiastic about it because they have found it frequently developed latent talents and increased their executive ability, their self confidence and their poise. It helped women to talk more easily in public and helped them to be better listeners. Dad and the children are thrilled when mother is a successful club leader, and all become interested in what home economics projects can bring to the home.

The women said the extension work helped them to be more economical with money, time, and strength. It also has taught them to have more leisure and to use it more wisely.

In Nebraska, Mothers' Vacation Camps provide an economical playtime for homemakers under the direction of the Extension Service. In these camps the women rest and play and sing; but along with the fun they have book reviews, round table discussions and talks on timely questions. Women enjoy the camps and they return home knowing there are other women who have similar problems and similar interests in their everyday life.

Homemakers are eager to have their homes attractive on the outside as well as on the inside and these council members said they had enjoyed the study of how to beautify the home grounds. In planning their kitchen arrangements, they had included attractive gardens which could be seen from their kitchen windows. They have learned how to screen off unpleasant views thru plantings - ideas they gained thru Extension Service channels.

Twenty years ago comparatively few homemakers had made a study of child care or child training or had met in groups to study family relationships. Now extension club members realize that human relationships are among the most vital things of life and that it is a subject full of interest and value to them.

Having interesting things to think about has helped to keep up the morale of the homemaker club members during difficult times and it has helped them to place truer values on worth while things. If Extension Service has done nothing else than to have had a part in helping formulate a happier attitude toward living on the farm and had a share in directing wholesome thinking on the part of farm women, it has been worth all that has ever been spent on it.

I am sure there are many women in all of the states who will agree with me that they too are glad they are living now when some of these dreams can come true and that the Smith-Lever Bill was passed twenty years ago and its benefits have kept increasing ever since.

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